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ABSTRACT

Haitians immigrating to the United States speak Creole: at the same time, they frequently claim French as their native language and want their children to be educated in French as well as in English. The teacher of the Haitian immigrant child soon learns that the language which will influence the child's learning of English is not French, but Creole. The Haitians themselves are experiencing conflicts over their social identity in American society and express their conflicts in their views on language use. French language and culture is a prestige factor here as well as in Haiti. An important task of the school, therefore, becomes parent training. Parents could be enabled to understand that the child may make the transition directly from Creole into English instead of via French. At the same time, opportunities should be made for older children who are fluent in English and Creole to learn French because it is the official language of Haiti and is part of its culture. Because of the problem of lack of materials in Creole and of certified teachers who know Creole, linguists and specialists in Creole should be encouraged to apply results of their research to improvement of instructional strategies in the bilingual classroom. (AMH)

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Center for Research on International Language Problems

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Instruction of Haitian Bilingual Children in the United States

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Les émigrants haïtiens—il y en a 300 000 à New-York et 40 000 à Miami—arrivent aux Etats-Unis tous parlant le créole; une minorité parle aussi le français. Ils disent fréquemment que leur langue maternelle est le français et que l'éducation de leurs enfants doit être faite en français, selon le modèle éducatif en cours en Haïti. C'est seulement à l'école qu'on découvre que les enfants ne font pas les mêmes fautes de grammaire que ceux qui parlent le français.

Comme en Haïti, les Haïtiens regroupés aux Etats-Unis qui éprouvent certains conflits d'Identité sociale expriment ces problèmes par leur interprétation de la langue utilisée. Aux Etats-Unis il existe de nouveaux débouchés économiques pour les Haïtiens et il en résulte un système plus souple de groupements socio-culturels.

Le but de cet exposé est de contribuer à la formulation d'une politique bilingue dans les écoles des Etats-Unis et de souligner les difficultés dans les programmes bilingues des Etats-Unis quand il y a une troisième langue de niveau mondial dans le pays d'origine.

Les spécialistes du Créole doivent aussi s'intéresser à l'application des résultats de leur recherche en améliorant la stratégie de l'enseignement et l'exploitation des matériaux dans les classes bilingues.

Bilingual education has only recently become a priority area for federal and state support in the United States. It was the civil rights movement in the 1960s that sparked an awareness of neglect among language minority groups and gave them the incentive to demand their rights. Because of pressure from minority groups, Federal policy on bilingualism was initiated in 1968 with the passage of the Bilingual Education Act. Throughout the past decade two important concepts directed the implementation of this policy: first, the concept that minority children must learn and function in English, the national (even if not the official) language, from the outset, and second, the concept that the school should take the children with what native language ability they possess and teach them the basics in their native language while at the same time instructing them in English until such a time as they can handle all instruction in English.[1]

When Haitian immigrants began coming to the United States in

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large numbers after François Duvalier came to power, American teachers in New York, Boston and Florida were faced with a culturally different immigrant whose first language was, almost without exception, Haitian Creole. Since the official language of Haiti is French, school systems tended to assume that Haitian children spoke some variety of French. Indeed only two years ago the official United States government designation for the language was "Haitian French." Haitian children are still included as French speaking in a number of bilingual education plans, thus compounding the difficulties in gathering reliable statistics on the number of Haitian children in American schools. On the basis of scattered inquiries, it can be estimated that New York State has about 15,000 Haitian children of whom about 80% are in the New York City metropolitan area.[2] In South Florida, there are probably about 2,000 Haitian children enrolled in public or private school.[3]

The assumption that Haitian children speak some French *patois* is reinforced by parent's statements to school officials that their child's native language is French. Although Haitian parents and children are aware of the difference between Creole and French (all of them speak Creole, but only a minority also speak French) they will frequently tell schools that their native language is French. That is the language the child would be taught in Haiti, where French is the language of government and business as well as of polite society. French is considered appropriate in formal contexts, whereas Creole is regarded as suitable for unofficial business, daily routine, small talk, and advertising on radio and television.

The teacher of the Haitian immigrant child soon learns that he is dealing with a language that differs from French; and that the language which will influence the child's learning of English is Creole, not French. The two languages are mutually unintelligible. This is because Haitian Creole shares with French some vocabulary and parts of the sound system but differs in grammar and syntax.[4] In the United States there are very few (perhaps 15) certified teachers who are familiar with the structure of the Creole language—which is necessary if the child is to master English rapidly. Thus, the Haitian-speaking child is dependent for English instruction on either Haitian teacher aides from the local community or on English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors.[5]

As in Haiti itself, Haitians resettling in the United States and experiencing conflicts over social identity express these conflicts in their views on language use. In Haiti, the traditional class system is based upon knowledge of French, wealth, racial mixture, and family name.

In the United States, there exist new chances for social mobility for Haitians through increased access to wealth and through more flexible standards of status. Thus, French language and culture become even more important in the United States as a mark of status difference, particularly by upper and middle class Haitians who have suffered downward economic and social mobility. Knowledge of French is a way of maintaining social distance from Haitians of lower standing who do not speak French well. Furthermore, the retention of French language and culture has the additional benefit of distinguishing Haitians from native black Americans in what is still, at least institutionally, a racist milieu. Thus, restratification and relegation to the lowest status category of American society have exacerbated the linguistic and cultural dualisms of Haitian society.[6]

In Haiti, parents expect school work to be difficult for the child, if only due to the fact that the language of instruction is different from the home language. In contrast, education in the United States is made as effortless as possible for the child. Haitian parents in the United States, even when they have lived in the U.S. for a long time, do not usually demand bilingual instruction because in Haiti the school is not seen as an extension of the home. Educators in the United States are therefore faced with an important sociological element in dealing with Haitian children, that is, the prestige factor in bilingualism.

Instead of ignoring the existence and relationship of the two Haitian languages, Creole and French, an important task of the school becomes parent training. The parent must be made to understand that the Creole-speaking child may make the transition directly into English instead of via French. It is unlikely that these children will return to Haiti—their future lies in linguistic and sociological adaptation to their new homeland. Yet at the same time it is important not to damage their culture and identity. Even when parents understand the importance of Creole and view it as a symbol of the national and racial unity of Haitian people, the bilingual teacher is faced with a major difficulty in creating effective bilingual programs for Haitian children: the lack of materials in Creole. In an effort to solve this problem, the Miami school district as well as the New York City Board of Education have each hired a Haitian curriculum developer to produce materials and criterion referenced tests in Creole. Likewise, the federal Office of Bilingual Education has recently allotted a modest sum to be used in the New Hampshire Franco-American Materials Development Center for the development of Haitian materials. A Creole-English dictionary is being developed by Professors Albert Valdman (Indiana

University) and Marie Racine (University of the District of Columbia). A summer institute on the teaching of Creole will be held at Indiana University in 1980. The next step must be to develop an adequate test for determining the level of fluency of Haitian Creole. At present we can only test the level of English proficiency. Thus, in many schools, a Haitian child not fluent in English may be classified as French-dominant or even Hispanic.

The Haitian immigrant differs from most of our linguistic minorities in his strong cultural cohesion and ties to the home country. In most of our linguistic minorities there is a strong tendency toward Anglicizing the language and culture of the immigrant. Hence we speak of a "Tex-Mex" or even "Spanglish" Chicano culture in the Southwest. Most Chicano writers and intellectuals write in English, not Spanish, and most of the Hispanic curriculum materials in the United States (even fables and folk tales) are adapted, simplified and edited in this country. However, since the Haitian retains strong ties to his island culture, the few Haitian-Creole materials that are available in Haiti may be easily adapted to use in the United States.

Eventually the primary language in Haitian bilingual programs, here as well as in Haiti, will be Creole. In Haiti the "creolization" of the primary school will depend on political decisions of the government. The current technical assistance agreement between the World Bank and Haiti, as well as Haitian Minister of Education Bernard, include creolization as an objective; but it will take time to transform these goals into practice. In the United States, efforts are hampered by severe shortages of materials and staff, as well as by disagreements over the role of French. It is difficult to add a third language to the primary school curriculum, particularly one that is not much used in the community. In the newly independent nation of the Seychelles, where education minister Jacques Hodoul has enunciated an official trilingual education policy, Creole is now used in elementary schools. However, the third language (French or English) is introduced only in the fifth or sixth year of school.[7]

The importance of parent education must again be emphasized. Creole-English bilingual instruction must be accepted by the parents, otherwise it will increase controversy in the Haitian communities. English, of course, remains the target language of our bilingual programs. Haitian Creole—the language that best reflects Haitian culture and the language which all Haitians speak—ought to be used in the primary grades, at least until the child becomes fluent in English. At the same time, opportunities must be offered to older Haitian children

who are fluent in English to take French as an elective since it is the official language of Haiti and part of its culture.

The purpose of this brief paper, since bilingual education is an integral part of education in the United States, is to encourage linguists to contribute to the formulation and implementaion of public policy in this area. At a time when bilingualism is under attack, when bilingualism is seen by some as being chauvinistic rather than as a bridge between two languages and cultures, we need linguists to participate in the formulation of public policy and in carrying out pedagogical tasks. Theoretical linguists who are involved in research on the acquisition and development of language must also become involved in the application of the results of this research in improving instructional strategies and materials in the bilingual classroom. Even more importantly, they must help in the development and implementation of programs in Creole—convincing often hostile boards of education of their importance, involving parents, recruiting and training teachers, searching for and developing materials and speaking out for bilingual programs in Haitian Creole. What better place to begin than in helping to create an improved environment for learning for Haitian children so that they may derive the maximum benefits from the education offered by their adopted country?

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RESUMO

La instruado de dulingraj haitiaj infanoj en Usono

La haitiaj enmigrintoj nombras 300 000 en Novjorkurbo kaj 40 000 en Miamio. Ili alvenas en Usono ĉiuj parolantaj la kreolan; malplimulto krome parolas la francan. Ili ofte asertas, ke ilia denaska lingvo estas la franca, kaj ke la edukado de iliaj infanoj devus esti farata en la franca, laŭ la kuranta eduka modelo de Haitio. Nur en la lernejo oni malkovras, ke la infanoj ne faras la samajn erarojn, de gramatiko, kiel infanoj, kiuj parolas france.

Kiel en Haitio, la haitianoj troviĝantaj en Usono, kiuj spertas certajn konfiktojn de sia socia idento, esprimas tiujn problemojn per sia interpretado de la uzata lingvo. En Usono ekzistas novaj ekonomiaj rimedoj por la hâitianoj; rezultas de tio pli flekseblaj socikulturaj grupiĝoj.

La celo de la nuna artikolo estas kontribui al la formuligo de dulingva politiko

en la lernejoj de Usono kaj substreki la malfacilaĵojn en la programoj de dulingva edukado en Usono, kiam troviĝas tria, tutmonde disvastigita, lingvo en la lando de deveno de la koncernaj infanoj.

La fakuloj pri kreolaj lingvoj devus, do, interesiĝi ankaŭ pri la apliko de la rezultatoj de sia esplorado, plibonigante tiel la instruadon kaj la eluzadon de instruiloj en la dulingvaj klasoj.

NOTES

1. This article is based on a paper delivered at the International Seminar on Creole, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, February 1979. For an overview of federal bilingual policy see John C. Molina, "National Policy on Bilingual Education: A Historical View of the Federal Role" in *Bilingual Education*, ed. LaFontaine, Persky, and Golubchik (Wayne, N.J.: Avery Publishers, 1978), pp. 16–22.
2. Approximately 300,000 Haitians live and work in New York.
3. About 40,000 Haitians are believed to be in Florida, half of which are estimated to be there illegally. For an account of their illegal migration to Florida from the Bahamas in 1978, see the articles by W. Hiassen, "Illegal Haitian immigrants in Florida" and "Haiti" in Tropic (Sunday supplement), of the *Miami Herald*, 12 and 19 November. (Children of these illegal immigrants face difficulties in being admitted to public schools.) See also the article by John Nordheimer in the *New York Times*, 18 July 1978, p. 1.
4. For a discussion of Haitian Creole's impact on English see R. and B. Hall, "A Contrastive Haitian Creole-English Checklist" in *The English Record*, 10, 2 (April 1971): 138–146.
5. For information on Haitian Creole and bilingual education in the U.S. see Yves DeJean, "Le Bilinguisme et les enfants haïtiens" in *Perspectives on Bilingual-Bicultural Education*, 1, 1 (September 1977).
6. For an analysis of the relationship between Haitian Creole and the social identity of Haitian immigrants see Susan H. Buchanan, "Language and Identity: Haitians in New York City," *International Migration Review* 13: 2 (Summer 1979): 298; Albert Valdman, "The Language Situation in Haiti," in *The Haitian Potential*, eds. V. Rubin and R. P. Schaedel (New York: Columbia University Teachers College Press, 1975), pp. 61–82; and Yves DeJean, *Dilemme en Haïti: Français en péril ou péril Français?* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Connaissance d'Haïti, 1975).
7. See *Demain l'Afrique*, no. 16 (18 December 1978), p. 12 for an interview with M. Hodoul.